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The Massachusetts Geographic Information Council  
**Meeting Notes**

**Making the Horse Drink: Tips for Expanding the Use of  
GIS in Municipal Government**

**When:** Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005, 10:00 AM – 12:00 Noon

**Where:** City of Waltham Government Center Auditorium  
119 School Street, Waltham, MA.

**PANEL MEMBERS**

**Michelle Collette**

*Planning Board Administrator*

Town of Groton

**Kim Honetschlager**

*GIS Coordinator*

Towns of Reading and North Reading

**Feng Yang**

*GIS Manager*

Town of Brookline

**Nathaniel Bowen**

*GIS Administrator*

City of Marlborough

**Mathew Barrett**

*GIS Program Coordinator*

Town of Concord

**Moderator:** Neil MacGaffey, Assistant Director, MassGIS.

Notes by N. MacGaffey

The premise for the session was that municipalities might have well-developed GIS capabilities but find that some departments/boards/committees (hereafter “departments”) in their community are reluctant to take advantage of GIS capabilities. This dilemma was explored through questions posed to the panel by both the moderator and members of the audience. The following is a listing of panel member recommendations on this sessions topic; they appear in no particular order:

1. Establish a GIS oversight committee. Use representatives of municipal departments on that committee to help build interest in non-user departments. You need to establish some interest and, ultimately, some trust in you (if you are the GIS person) and in what GIS can do; this kind of committee and its members may help open doors in departments and help build interest and trust.
2. Identify a critical need in a department. This can be an existing need or a new one. Then make a sample map, do a prototype of some analysis or of an application that supports this need and introduce the GIS and its capabilities using this vehicle.

3. A companion to the strategy in #2, above, is getting to know the details of how a department uses geographic information. What are the work processes/flows? What maps and tabular data do they rely on? If you're allowed to, hang out at the public counter and see what information is needed to meet public requests. Use what you learn to identify useful ways in which the GIS might be incorporated into existing workflows; although harder to accomplish, you might even identify how a workflow might be improved by incorporating GIS capabilities or products. GIS products or capabilities might take the form of standard maps, easier access to GIS information (see #6 below), or perhaps even a customized GIS application.
4. If you have an information technology department, use them to help you keep on top of what's happening. One way to accomplish this is if your IT department has to sign off on hardware or software purchases before they are made, you can ask them to check with you on GIS related purchases. This way, you have a reason to go to the department looking for purchase approval and find out more about what they are doing so that you can coordinate their efforts and yours.
5. Use envy as a way of creating interest. Take a map you have made for another department. Get permission to display the map in a prominent location. Be sure to identify the role of the GIS in producing the map. Alternatively, create a large format document showing how another department uses a GIS application. For example, an abutter mailing labels application or a link between scanned documents and map information. Display the document in a prominent location or forum. Easily viewed locations next to entrances or public counters work well! Don't overlook the potential for a large, attractive, colorful map or other document to create interest in your GIS!
6. Make the GIS easier to use and access. One way to accomplish this is by using an Inter- or Intranet mapping presence or, if you are an ESRI software user, ArcPublisher as tools for creating expanded interest in GIS use. Consider creating a public access "kiosk" if that's an easier challenge than an Inter- or Intranet presence.
7. Finally, you may find that having a strategic plan for GIS, and periodically refreshing it, will help keep everyone from upper management to department staff engaged in identifying existing and new work that could benefit from GIS capabilities. The planning process can be used to identify new data sets, data sets for which greater spatial accuracy or better quality attributes are required, and new custom applications that need developing. A plan can be the basis for systematically making the case for GIS funding as your community cycles through fiscal planning cycles.